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ABSTRACT

While composition and journalism as academic subjects are roughly contemporaneous and share similar ends, they have been and remain curiously detached. This paper (part of a panel discussion) examines how journalism itself and the teaching of journalism in college has intersected and diverged from the teaching of writing. The pre-Civil War purpose of education in the rhetorical tradition was to prepare a civic leader who understood the values of his culture and used speech to make those values effective in public affairs. The paper takes the broadest viewpoint, noting some of the 19th and 20th century connections and divergences the two disciplines faced in struggling to make their fields meaningful within academia and beyond it. It argues, first, that both academic journalism and composition have had conflicted relationships with the universities that have housed them: both the disciplines themselves and their universities have wavered about whether they were utilitarian disciplines or academic ones, and both have had trouble explaining how their work would actually trickle down to influence the society they strived to fix, or even whether their academic ideas should trickle down. The final part of the paper argues that journalism education's bifurcated mission of providing professional-service training and creating a better, more active citizenry should shed light on efforts to do both. (NKA)

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Civic Rhetoric Hot off the Press: 100 Years of Journalism in the Composition Classroom.

by Charles Paine

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (52nd, Denver, Colorado, March 14-17, 2001).

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Setup

The three of us explore the connections between composition studies and journalism, all using historical strategies. We believe that journalism offers a particularly interesting context for composition studies at this time because of the field's current interest in civic rhetoric, public intellectualism, and activist teaching. Indeed, while composition and journalism as academic subjects are roughly contemporaneous and share similar ends, they have been and remain curiously detached. This panel will examine how journalism itself and the teaching of journalism in college has intersected and diverged from the teaching of writing.

Our project might be seen collectively as one extension of Michael Halloran's well-known 1982 article, "Rhetoric in the American College Curriculum: The Decline of Public Discourse," where he showed that before the Civil War, "the purpose of education in the rhetorical tradition was to prepare…a civic leader who understood all the values of his culture and used artful speech to make those values effective in the arena of public affairs" (246). I concur with Halloran that these ideals were transformed into practices that no longer much resembled Ciceronian ideals. But our three papers show that such ideals did not vanish altogether, and that the relationships between composition and journalism reveal that the civic ideal survived in other forms.

The second two papers in the panel will examine particular moments in early twentieth-century composition scenes where journalism and composition were brought together. I'm acting as the set-up person. I will take the broadest and therefore least precise viewpoint, noting some of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century connections and divergences the two disciplines faced in struggling to make their fields meaningful within academia and beyond it.

My argument

I argue, first, that both academic journalism and composition have had conflicted relationships with the universities that have housed them: both the disciplines themselves and their universities have wavered about whether they were utilitarian disciplines or academic ones, and both have had trouble explaining how their work would actually trickle down to influence the society they strived to fix, or even *whether* their academic ideas *should* trickle down. In the final portion of the paper, I argue that journalism education's bifurcated mission of providing professional-service training and creating a better, more active citizenry should shed light on our own efforts to do both. The story of journalism education supports Sharon Crowley's contention that it is difficult for a discpline to do both missions well, that, in fact, the service mission of composition—rendering undergraduates fit for higher education—interferes with its civic mission of creating citizens who can respond meaningfully within the public sphere.

The course of journalism in higher education

Both composition and journalism were products of the "new university" and of the Progressivist beliefs that influenced the intellectuals who designed it. Composition, of

course, was invented at Harvard around 1885, and while the practical and ideological causes have been debated by historians, there is pretty good agreement that it was most noticeably a response to a *crisis*, what Robert Connors has called the "'Illiteracy of American Boys' crisis" (48). Journalism, I'll argue, had its beginnings in a similar crisis.

While the civic contributions of composition studies have been sketchy at best, some scholars, like Nan Johnson, have argued that according to nineteenth-century rhetorical theory, "there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between…the study and practice of rhetoric… and civic virtue" (45), an ideal that was *not* entirely lost in the transformation to composition. I have argued elsewhere (*Resistant Writer*) that at least part of the motivation came from intellectuals' distress over new forms of public journalism, most notably the newspaper. The composition course was theorized—theorized rather *poorly*, I would add—as a way to remedy the problem of the ignorant voter, who was too easily persuaded by bad popular rhetoric. And as histories like James Berlin's and Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University* have argued, this civic mission creeps in again and again throughout the twentieth-century, always poorly articulated and usually in efforts to raise the intellectual, practical, and ethical standing of composition studies and the composition course.

Journalism higher education aspired clumsily toward ideals that were similarly contradictory, and journalism has been deeply conflicted about the goals of its education in ways that are similar to composition's conflicts.

Indeed, the great surge in higher-education journalism mirrors that of composition, although the outbreak occurred some 30 years later. While the 1870s saw a few institutions make early, unsuccessful attempts to make journalism part of the college

curriculum, it wasn't until the second decade of the twentieth century that a true journalism curriculum began. As early as 1892, infamous yellow-journalist and namesake of the Pulitzer Prize, Joseph Pulitzer asked Columbia University if he could underwrite a school of journalism with $2 million. They scorned his offer because, one, as intellectuals they despised bad-rhetoric plutocrats like Pulitzer; and, two, they could not imagine how journalism might be considered academic inquiry, and they were certainly not in the business of training graduates for such utilitarian pursuits. But Pulitzer persevered and finally, in 1902, they begrudgingly accepted his money, so long as Pulitzer pledged in writing that he would have nothing whatsoever to do with the school.

The University of Missouri opened its school of journalism in 1908. Missouri's school too was endowed by a millionaire newspaper publisher, E. W. Stephens of Columbia, Missouri. Shortly thereafter, as journalism historian David Sloan chronicles, "journalism education fairly exploded": By 1912, "33 institutions offered instruction in journalism. By 1918 that number …increased to 91; in 1920, to 131. …In 1928, approximately 300 colleges offered journalism courses, and 56 of them had separate schools or colleges" (10). The first doctoral programs weren't established until the late 1940s.

Like composition studies, higher-education journalism has had trouble identifying its mission. Was this education for humanizing its students or preparing them to do a specific kind of work, work either in within the academy or in the world of work. Sloan characterizes journalism education as "schizophrenic…. Possessing a sense of *inferiority* to both professional journalism and academia, it has tried to prove itself to both… Its history therefore has been marked by the question of what the role of journalism

education is. Is it to be professional training, or is it academic study? If it serves as a trade school for the press, how can it obtain legitimacy as an academic discipline?" (4)

Composition studies, while having its own similar conflicts, did not have to face these problems squarely, because it existed within the academically respected field of English and because universities believed that composition's service contributions were a necessary evil. Composition, as we know too well, needed no airs of disinterested scholarship to survive. Journalism didn't have that luxury, but it did have something that was in some ways better and that allowed it too to develop along two lines—it had lots of millionaires. There were not, of course, scores of millionaires who had made their fortune in rhetoric or composition, who could endow schools with the money to create a rhetoric department. It's hard to say which makes a better patron, an established academic department like English, or a collection of robber-baron business persons.

In any case, until around 1950, each journalism program adhered to one of two schools of thought. The Columbia school adopted the ideal of disinterested criticism and humanistic education, while the Missouri school adopted as its goal practical training for work in the journalism trades.

The Columbia-school advocates argued that disinterested academic inquiry would be good for society, because it would fashion a theoretical basis and would create journalists with integrity, by humanizing them. Pulitzer argued to the Columbia trustees and in the *North American Review* that journalism would provide—if I may borrow some contemporary wording—a trickle-down intellectual stimulus that would somehow boost the moral soundness of journalists and thus remedy the *crisis of yellow journalism*, which many people (especially university elites) believed had created an emotional and ignorant

citizenry. (Pulitzer never seems to have admitted that he was as responsible as anyone for yellow journalism and that his millions were derived from it. His biographers and other historians speculate that like Alfred Nobel, he had a guilty conscience about what he had wrought and used his money to make things right [Swanberg, Noble, Marzolf, Sloan].)

Pulitzer argued that "a cynical, mercenary, demagogic press will produce in time a people as base as itself" (659), and that university culture might do something to make public discourse and the citizenry better—better informed, better participants in public life. He certainly wasn't the first person to argue for the immense and pernicious power of newspapers in America or for the role of universities in changing things (see Paine), but he was the first newspaper robber baron to do so, and the first with the money to back up his proposals. Universities should not concentrate on teaching students the ins and outs of actual newspaper work, Pulitzer argued, but should help students develop intellectually and morally, by providing courses in ethics, philosophy, and history. (Curiously, despite the fact that early journalism faculty were very often from English departments, you rarely see any of them including literature as a course of study that would promote moral development.). According to this model, educating students one by one would foster a new moral conscience within the press and thus in society (Marzolf).

But in most undergraduate schools, even to this day, it has been the Missouri school that has dominated. These schools treat journalism as a profession, like law or medicine, focusing on training their graduates to get specific jobs done. They emphasized what they often called "specific" courses or "nuts-and-bolts" courses. They saw journalism education as a *service*, not so much a service to the university itself, as composition most often saw its service, but to the profession of journalism. These

educators saw their role as training the professionals that the press wanted, not scholars, thinkers, and critics. They had no intentions of the changing the world, only seeing to it that the profession had the workers it needed to do its job.

Today, few schools still adhere exclusively to a single school of thought, although there are a few high-profile institutions that act as watchdog critics of the press (e.g., Columbia and the Annenberg School at the University of Pennsylvania). Today, journalism educators try to educate both humanistically and practically—and it's interesting to note that they, like composition teacher-theorists, seem to satisfy no one. Like composition studies with its often-muddled missions, journalism education fights a war on two fronts, trying to satisfy both the profession and academia, satisfying neither. Although about 85% of those hired by newspapers today come from journalism programs, practitioners generally believe that journalism is a poor preparation compared to the school of hard knocks. In the words of one journalism professional: "I went to [a] journalism educator's convention….. And I went around these different sessions and I never heard so much crap in my life. Research papers on little known facts…. And some guy gets his Ph.D. on this strength?" (qtd. in Sloan, 18). Many journalism teachers are highly sensitive to this criticism. On the other hand, within academia, they have problems similar to those composition faces: very few journalism and communication departments enjoy academic prestige outside their field.

Finally, the politics of teaching in journalism departments and composition are similar. Just as English departments now depend on composition to subsidize their Joyce and Pound scholars, communications and journalism departments for the most part depend on the public-speaking course and core-curriculum requirements (taught almost

exclusively by part-timers and adjuncts) to validate their existence. Similar to the English department, many communication and journalism departments depend on an underclass of teachers to do the teaching of service so that its scholars can do their research and teach their boutique courses. The problem is less severe and, it seems, less debated in journalism, but it exists.

Final point

To close somewhat polemically, I will simply observe that this very rough and brief survey supports Sharon Crowley's contention in *Composition in the University* that it is difficult for a discipline to provide service—whether that service is to the university or to a profession—*and* support scholars who theorize public discourse as well as produce graduates who will take an active part in public discourse.

It's true that there is far more to journalism in higher education that the story I've sketched here. It could be rightly argued, for instance, that I've assumed that universities have exerted identical pressures on the two disciplines, despite their different origins. It could be noted that the published debate on using underclass teachers in journalism and communications is meager compared to our debates.

Nonetheless, even when the main goal of the discipline, as in journalism, is to prepare people to contribute to public forums, the service side of the mission dominates. As we all know, universities are good at recognizing and rewarding scholarly achievement, but they're not so good at acknowledging the importance of service and teaching. As we know from our own discipline's history, one might generalize and say that when a discipline identifies with providing tangible services coupled with more socially aware or even humanistic inquiry, it is stigmatized. I'm ambivalent about

Crowley's recommendations, but I think that the story of journalism education serves as a cautionary tale about how difficult it is to mix service missions with larger, social, intellectual missions.

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